

EMERGENCY HOME REPAIRS AFTER A STORM

Stay out of a damaged house until a building inspector says it is safe, photograph the damage before you touch anything, and stop more water getting in by covering the roof as soon as the storm has passed. Then dry the house out within 24 to 48 hours if you can, because CDC says that after that you should assume mold is growing.

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After a hurricane, tornado, or flood, the danger often shifts from the storm to the house itself: weakened structure, gas leaks, live wiring, a roof that lets the next rain in, and mold. This page covers the first repairs a household can make safely, and when to leave the job to an inspector, an electrician, or a crew. For shutting off water, gas, and power, see how to shut off water, gas, and electricity.

DECIDE IF IT IS SAFE TO GO IN

Use this before you enter any building that took storm or flood damage.

1. If the house is damaged, do not go back in until a building inspector has examined it for safety (CDC).
2. Go back only in daylight, especially if the power is out (CDC).
3. From outside, look for loose power lines, and smell and listen for gas. CDC's mold guide says to check for gas leaks and make sure the electricity and gas are turned off (CDC).
4. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, leave right away and contact emergency authorities. Do not go back in until you are told it is safe (CDC).
5. Look for sagging ceilings or floors and other structural problems, and watch for wet, muddy, or slippery floors (CDC).
6. Once inside, leave at once if you hear shifting or strange noises (CDC).
7. If the house has been closed up for several days, enter briefly to open doors and windows, and let it air out for at least 30 minutes before you stay to work (CDC).

Check: nobody smells gas, no ceiling or floor is sagging, and you have a clear way out.

■ WARNING

Never turn power on or off, or use an electric tool or appliance, while standing in water (CDC). CDC says people with asthma or other breathing problems, or with weakened immune systems, should stay away from moldy buildings, and children should not take part in disaster cleanup (CDC).

DOCUMENT THE DAMAGE

Use this before you remove, clean, or repair anything.

1. Take photos or video of the outside and the inside of the building (FEMA).
2. Label them by room before you remove anything.
3. Photograph items you throw away. CDC suggests photos of discarded items for insurance claims (CDC).
4. Contact your insurance company before you start cleanup (CDC).
5. Save every repair receipt (FEMA).
6. Before any structural work, get a building permit from your local building authority (FEMA).

Check: each room has photos taken before cleanup, and receipts are kept in one place.

FEMA says you do not need to wait to start cleanup, and that if the home needs a tarp to prevent further damage, you should install it as quickly as possible (FEMA).

COVER A DAMAGED ROOF

Use this when the storm has passed and a damaged roof is letting water in. The steps below come from OSHA's safety guidance for workers who install roof tarps (OSHA). Falls from roofs are the main risk, so do as much as you can from the ground or a ladder.

1. Wait for the weather. OSHA says never install a tarp during a storm, while it is windy or raining.
2. Look for downed power lines and treat every line as live. Do not use a metal ladder near power lines or energized equipment.
3. Stay off the roof until its strength and structure have been checked. Use a roof rake or brush from the ground to clear debris.
4. Work from a ladder or other stable platform instead of the roof whenever you can. Set the ladder at a 4 to 1 angle (1 foot out from the building for every 4 feet of height to the eave), and have it extend 3 feet above the roof edge.
5. Do not stand on a steep roof (steeper than 4 inches of rise for every 12 inches across) without a fall protection system. If you do not have one, this is a job for a crew.

6. Fasten the sheeting down with wood strips. FEMA's Operation Blue Roof installs its plastic sheeting "using strips of wood that are secured to the roof with nails or screws" (FEMA).
7. Do not walk on the tarp once it is down. OSHA says a tarped roof is very slippery, especially when wet, and tarped-over skylights and openings will not be obvious underfoot.

Check: no water comes in during the next rain, and you never stood on a steep or damaged roof without fall protection.

■ TIP

After some major disasters, FEMA runs **Operation Blue Roof** through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It installs reinforced plastic sheeting on eligible primary homes at no charge to the homeowner. FEMA says flat roofs and roofs of clay, slate, or asbestos tile do not qualify, and the sheeting is designed to last 30 days, so plan permanent repairs. Sign up at a Right of Entry center or call 1-888-ROOF-BLU (1-888-766-3258) (FEMA). FEMA's program page is archived, so confirm it is active for your disaster.

SEAL A ROOM WITH PLASTIC AND TAPE

Use this when officials tell you to shelter in place because the outside air is contaminated. Ready.gov calls sealing a room a temporary protective measure. For sheltering from fallout, see shelter in place.

1. Pick an interior room with few windows if possible (Ready.gov).
2. Turn off fans, air conditioning, and forced air heating.
3. Lock the doors, and close the windows, air vents, and fireplace dampers.
4. Cut thick plastic sheeting several inches wider than each opening, and label each sheet for the opening it fits.
5. Tape the plastic over each window, door, and air vent with duct tape: corners first, then all the edges.

Check: every window, door, and vent in the room is covered, with every edge taped down.

Cut and label the sheets ahead of time, so they are ready if an alert comes.

DRY OUT A WET HOUSE

Use this as soon as it is safe to work in a house that took in flood water or rain. CDC says that if you could not dry the house and everything in it within 24 to 48 hours, you should assume mold is growing (CDC).

1. Put on protective gear: at least an N-95 respirator, protective gloves, and goggles (CDC).
2. Remove standing water and wet materials. Use a wet vacuum on floors, carpets, and hard surfaces.
3. Open all doors and windows while you work, and leave as many open as is safe when you leave.
4. Open inside doors, closets, cabinets, and vanities. Pull out drawers, wipe them clean, and stack them to dry. Open the attic access, after checking nothing will fall on you.
5. When the electricity is safe to use, run fans and dehumidifiers. Place fans at a window or door so they blow air out, not in (CDC). Do not use fans once mold has started to grow, because they may spread it (CDC).
6. Throw away anything that was wet with flood water and cannot be cleaned and dried completely within 24 to 48 hours.

Check: the house and everything left in it are dry, and you have fixed the source of the water.

■ **WARNING**

If the heating and cooling system took in flood water, do not turn it on: CDC says a mold-contaminated system will spread mold through the house (CDC). If you run a generator for fans or pumps, keep it outside and at least 20 feet from the building (CDC). See generator safety.

CLEAN UP MOLD SAFELY

Use this when you see or smell mold after a flood or leak. CDC says the job may be too difficult or dangerous to do yourself, and to get help from qualified professionals if you can (CDC).

1. Protect your lungs: wear at least an N-95 respirator. For long jobs like ripping out moldy drywall, CDC says to wear a half-face or full-face respirator (CDC).
2. Protect your skin: wear non-latex, vinyl, nitrile, or rubber gloves, and do not touch mold or moldy items with bare hands.
3. Protect your eyes: wear goggles made to keep out dust and small particles. CDC says glasses or goggles with open vent holes will not protect you.
4. Clean with water and a detergent. Remove all the mold you can see, then dry the surface right away.
5. If you use other cleaning products, do not mix them. Never mix bleach and ammonia, because it can create toxic vapors. Never use bleach in a closed space; open the windows and doors first (CDC).
6. Do not paint or caulk over mold. Fix the water problem and clean up all the mold first.
7. When you leave the site, shower and change your clothes so you do not carry mold back to where you are staying.

Check: CDC says that if you still see or smell mold, you have more work to do. Testing for mold is not usually recommended; a careful look and smell for mold is usually enough. If asthma, allergies, or skin or eye irritation get worse when you return home, there may still be mold.

Ready.gov adds: wear protective clothing, work with someone else, and document property damage with photographs.

PRACTICE LIST

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- ☐ Walked the outside of the house and listed what to check before going back in
- ☐ Photographed every room now, as a before record for insurance
- ☐ Set up a ladder at a 4 to 1 angle, 3 feet above the roof edge, and looked for power lines
- ☐ Cut and labeled plastic sheeting for one interior room
- ☐ Found the wet vacuum, fans, and the windows and doors to open for airflow
- ☐ Put together N-95 respirators, nonlatex gloves, and unvented goggles

TRACK Survival skills

SHEET 8 of 13

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COMPILED FROM THESE SOURCES

1. CDC, Guidelines for Cleaning Safely After a Disaster
2. CDC, Safety Guidelines: Reentering Your Flooded Home
3. CDC, Homeowner's and Renter's Guide to Mold Cleanup After Disasters (2015)
4. CDC, 8 Tips to Clean Up Mold
5. FEMA, Don't Wait to Clean Up or Make Repairs
6. FEMA, Frequently Asked Questions about Operation Blue Roof
7. OSHA, Roof Tarping (Blue Roof) Safety, Fact Sheet FS-3926
8. Ready.gov, Shelter

9. Ready.gov, Hurricanes

Every safety claim on this sheet links to its primary source.